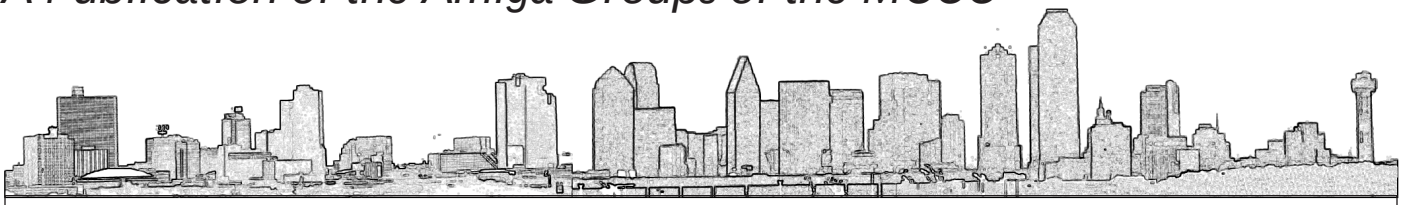
The AGM Connection

A Publication of the Amiga Groups of the MCCC



Fort Worth *March 1997* *Dallas*

The Printed Page

A Look at Print Drivers and Printers

In last month's newsletter I mentioned a product I am now using to print this newsletter called Studio II and I promised a review as soon as I became more familiar with it. I followed that up with a rather disasterous meeting at Amiga-By-The-Loop where we weren't even able to get the product installed properly to demo it on all the printers we had available. I don't think this is going to qualify as a full review, but I have spent quite a bit of time with both Studio II and its competitor, TurboPrint. I've discovered quite a bit about them both.

The TurboPrint that I have used for this review is the demo version 5 that is available on the BBS. It's partially disabled in that it will only print on one side of the page and its text handling is somewhat disabled, but otherwise is fully functional. The Studio II that I'm using is version 2.14, which is the latest version available, last updated in the latter part of January. Both products offer similar features. Both offer standard print drivers that become part of your system. Likewise, both offer a stand-alone print utility so that you can print a picture directly from disk without using any other software. Studio II also provides a special PageStream 3.x driver.

Let's talk about those external utilities. Without question, TurboPrint has the superior interface. First, it actually shows the picture that you are going to print. Studio II only shows the outline of the picture. This isn't a big disadvantage, of course, but seeing the picture is just nicer. Also, TurboPrint gives a clearer idea of your picture's position on the soon-to-be-printed page. TurboPrint shows the full page size and then colors the margins of the page that your printer can't print on. Using this layout, you can tell exactly where your picture will wind up on the printed page. Studio II, by contrast, shows only the printable area of the page. Since the unprintable margins are not equal on all four sides of the page, it is difficult to tell where your picture will actually be positioned on the page. Drag out the calculator! In addition, the registered version of TurboPrint has support for outline fonts and allows you to add text to your printouts — for example, to add captions. Studio II does not provide any text support at all. In short, TurboPrint wins hands down in a comparison of interfaces.

But this isn't just a comparison of interfaces. The thing that counts most of all with a print driver or print utility is the quality of the printed output. That's what your money ($85 for either product) is being spent for, after all. When output becomes the measure of quality, Studio II moves into clear first place. Of course, I have to qualify this statement by pointing out that I have only tested the products using my printer: a new HP DeskJet 693C. Other printers may produce varying results. I should also point out that either product produces output that is far superior to the output that can be achieved with standard drivers or with standard PageStream 3.2 drivers.

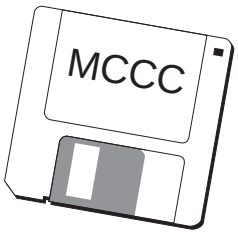
Since the 693C is a color printer, I was interested in seeing which driver produced the most accurate color. Using the default dither settings, the TurboPrint output was far too warm and the Studio II output was somewhat too cool. The default Studio II dither pattern also muddied the picture somewhat. I tried both products using the Floyd-Steinberg dither pattern. With this pattern, TurboPrint color was still far too warm while Studio II was almost perfect. Both products allow you to adjust color settings so that's something that can be overcome. What disturbed me more was the banding that appeared in TurboPrint output. I was unable to find a TurboPrint dither pattern that did not produce an unacceptable banding. Studio II does not produce any noticable banding using almost any dither pattern. The Floyd-Steinberg pattern that I use for color output is perfect. The 256 grey-scale halftone that I use for black and white output is likewise free of banding and superior to what TurboPrint seems capable of producing. Note: At the ABL meeting, I mentioned that Studio II could not print using my printer's maximum color resolution of 600 x 300 dpi. Not true! It can be accessed by specifying "Presentation" quality. Another interface shortcoming.

One more thought... Printing a color picture on my printer takes about 12 minutes with either product. I wondered if the printer or my computer was the hold-up. By "printing" to disk and then copying that file to par:, I discovered that my computer took 1.5 minutes. The printer takes the other 10 minutes or so. Moral: buy as fast a printer as you can. The HP DeskJet 870 should be about twice as fast as the 693.

...Bill Raecke

Disks of the Month

1218 *MCC NList— MUI Custom Class*
MPEG Anim — Devil's Mine
1219 *3D Stars — BlitzBlanker screen blank module*
CyberUpdate 2.21 — CyberGraphX update
FastIPrefs 40.30 — Replacement for IPrefs
1220 *Action Cat — Action game*
Anim Datatype — play anims with Multiview
1221 *ClassUpdate — Class Act classes update*
LibGuide — Tells what programs use libraries
1222 *CyberAVI — AVI anim player for CyberGraphX*
Miami — TCP/IP client software
RexxDosSupport — ARexx DOS support library
1223 *ClassUpdate — Class Act classes update*
DevGuide — Tells what programs use devices
HTMLess — Removes HTML codes from text
MCC Busy — MUI Custom Class
Miami WB Icons — Icons for Miami
1224 *ManiacBall — Breakout with paddles on 4 sides*
1225 *Anim Datatype — play anims with Multiview*
New8n1 — Fast replacement for serial.device
ProgEd 2.3 — Powerful text editor
1226 *akJFIF datatype — JPEG datatype*
ajSVG datatype — SuperView datatype
AmigaLoad — Display of CPU load, memory, etc.
WebCleaner 2.11 — Font for web browsers
1227 *ajPNG datatype — PNG datatype*
ClassUpdate — Class Act classes update



The AGM Connection

MCCC
P.O. Box 813
Bedford, Texas 76095

Please Forward
Address Correction Requested

March Calendar

March 4 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
7:30 pm — Bill Raecke's Place

March 11 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
7:30 pm — Bell Helicopter Training Facility

No Change in our Meeting Place This month

March 18 — Amiga North Dallas Chapter
7:30 pm — Richardson Square Mall, Community Room

Newsletter Deadline — March 22, 7:00 am

Membership Watch

Expired February, 1997

Mike & Shirley Bond
Phillip Chatman
Ken Doll
Fred McNabb
Foster McCowan
Kenny Teoh
Barbara Cramer
Thomas Critchfield
Douglas Gaudin
Ben McCall
Chip Schaefer

Expiring March, 1997

James Dunnam
Jack & Mary Hagemeyer
Tom Ryan
Darrell Simmonds
Michael Turner
Crystal Eikanger
Mary Kelly
Robert Shepherd
Mark Siedle